

**BENCH-BAR COALITION MEETING
WELCOMING REMARKS BY
CHIEF JUSTICE RONALD M. GEORGE
MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2008 – 8:00 A.M.**

Good morning. It's truly a pleasure to have the opportunity to recognize the invaluable contributions made by the members of the Bench-Bar Coalition and to thank you personally. During the 2007-2008 legislative session, the Bench-Bar Coalition's visibility and effectiveness increased even further — which was particularly important during a time of financial difficulties and other competing interests in Sacramento.

As you know, I regularly meet with members of the Legislature to discuss the Judicial Branch's concerns and needs, having as many as a dozen separate meetings in the State Capitol in a single day's visit, occasionally adding a visit with the Governor to a busy schedule. I can tell you that the leadership and members of the California Senate and Assembly recognize the tremendous strength of the partnership between the BBC and the judicial branch and the important role you play — not only as advocates for the courts, but also as sources of information for legislators and their staff, who frequently will mention that they have spoken to a member of the BBC.

Your willingness to dedicate your time and energy has made a real difference — and a quick look at what you have accomplished over the past year shows just how active and effective you have been. Starting last winter, BBC working groups focused on addressing the coalition's 2007-2008 goals. These objectives included identifying individuals in the Legislature who would be willing to advance our branch's requests, and encouraging greater awareness of judicial branch issues among legislative members and staff. Speaking of staff, there was increased focus on cultivating relationships with legislative staff, a very important part of the process.

In March, the BBC held its first 2008 Day in Sacramento in conjunction with the State of the Judiciary Address. Through the BBC's expanded outreach, almost 30 new bar leaders were in attendance for the first time, the great majority of them from women's, minority, local, or specialty bar associations or legal services organizations.

On the first day of the March event, the initial MCLE training session on legislative advocacy took place, and nearly 70 BBC members attended. Following this training, attendees were provided with in-depth briefings on judicial-branch-related legislative priorities to prepare them for visits with members of the Legislature and their staff.

Approximately 125 BBC members and guests attended my State of the Judiciary Address that afternoon and then joined in discussions with members of the legislative and executive branches at the annual Judicial-Legislative-Executive Forum.

The next day, of course, was the hands-on application of your skills — 90 BBC members divided into 14 regional teams and met with more than 100 legislators and key staff who deal with judicial branch matters in their fiscal and policy committees. Among the topics discussed were court facilities, court security, and the judicial branch budget.

The following month, the BBC turned its focus to another very effective program — Day on the Bench visits, in which legislators and key staff members visit courts in their districts. The BBC worked in collaboration with the California Judges Association to update the planning guide for these events, and the results were provided to presiding judges and executive officers during statewide Administrative Office of the Courts regional office meetings.

May 2008 was time for a second round of Day in Sacramento legislative visits. These visits were focused on detailed follow-up meetings with a select group of legislators expected to be instrumental in the judicial branch budget process, in Judicial-Council-sponsored legislation in committee, and in other legislative action on our bills. Again, the primary topics were courthouse facilities including construction bond funding, court security, and the judicial branch budget.

During the following month, June, BBC members held 25 Day in the District meetings around the state with key legislators and district office staff. These outreach efforts provided an opportunity for BBC members to visit local legislative offices, meet district directors and staff, and lay the groundwork for future collaboration.

In July, BBC's Executive Committee formally adopted guidelines for the selection and terms of at-large Executive Committee members.

The BBC actions I have outlined thus far already demonstrate the remarkable efforts put forth on behalf of the judicial branch by those of you seated in this room and your colleagues in the BBC. But even more was asked of you, and I know that you delivered. Throughout the year, BBC members receive "urgent action requests" from the AOC's Office of Governmental Affairs, asking them to send letters and e-mails and make calls and even personal visits when Judicial-Council-sponsored legislation faces critical policy and fiscal committee votes. The ability to call on BBC members who come from the districts represented by individual legislators was a critical asset. We are very grateful for your commitment and your willingness to jump into action on a moment's notice in response to these calls for assistance.

What comes next? Well, I can say with some assurance that the fiscal crisis in the state is not likely to disappear before next year's round of budget talks in Sacramento. During the current extremely difficult budget year, I firmly believe that your efforts made the difference in placing us in the strongest position possible.

At the conclusion of the Day in the District meetings, BBC members noted the significant need for additional outreach and education to provide legislators and their staff with a better understanding of the structure and administration of the judicial branch budget, including how trial courts are funded, how their appropriations are distributed among the courts, and how local courts fund their operations.

Legislators and staff also would benefit from a greater understanding of the state appropriations limit and how this formula affects the trial courts' ability to provide services to legislators' constituents.

Beyond specific budget and legislative issues, I would imagine that you encountered another phenomenon that I at times encounter during my visits to Sacramento. Nowadays very few legislators are lawyers or have much, if any, experience with the judicial branch. In contrast, all of us are well steeped in the fundamental principles underlying the importance of an impartial judiciary, the doctrine of separation of powers, and the need for effective access to the courts for all. That is not, however, universally true among either legislators or staff. Part of your challenge — and mine — is explaining why funding the judicial branch, providing courthouse security, building adequate facilities, and improving access for all, are not simply demands from just another agency of government — but are requests essential to ensuring the strength and effectiveness of one of our three coequal branches of government.

To build on the remarkable contributions you have made thus far, the BBC will be exploring strategies to keep legislators and staff up to date on courthouse construction and renovation developments in their respective districts. This objective reflects the BBC's focus for the next legislative session on enhancing and expanding the contacts and communications that you have developed.

We will be identifying potential legislative leaders to promote the judicial branch's issues. The topic of today's meeting, *The Lawyer Legislator's Role in Shaping Tomorrow's Judiciary*, is especially timely in light of the declining numbers of attorneys serving in the Legislature.

The chairs and vice chairs of the Senate and Assembly Judiciary Committees for the 2009-2010 Legislative Session have been invited as panelists. Assembly Member Dave Jones, the outgoing chair of the Assembly Judiciary Committee, will serve as moderator. He has been a great friend to the judicial branch and has been a forceful presence in efforts to improve the administration of justice in California, most recently in his leadership role in furthering our efforts to pass the courthouse construction bond measure, the courthouse transfer bill, and the authorization of new judicial positions. Members of the Senate and Assembly representing Monterey, along with the Presiding Judge and chief executive officer of the Superior Court of Monterey, also have been asked to join us.

As members of the BBC, you are in a unique position to cultivate relationships with lawyer-legislators on judicial branch policy and budget issues, and to serve as an available resource for them. We also need to focus on non-attorney legislators or legislators not sitting on judiciary or budget committees, in order to raise their awareness of the challenges facing the court system.

Another focus will be on cultivating relationships you have begun to build with legislative district office directors and staff. These are individuals who can greatly enhance our effort to disseminate our message on judicial branch priorities. Through their personal experience, BBC members will be able to obtain a better perspective on what troubles the residents of specific legislative districts and on the best way to clear up local misconceptions or address valid issues that are being raised. You also will have an opportunity to form similar relationships with next year's new legislators.

This all may sound somewhat overwhelming, but I have two observations to make. First, what you are doing truly is making a difference and amounts to a vital public service of which you can be proud. Second, one way to make this task a bit easier would be to expand the membership of the BBC. I encourage you to continue to work with bench, bar, and legal services organizations in an effort to involve them further by expanding their participation and collaboration under your guidance.

The BBC has been a truly successful model for justice system partnerships, and I am proud and honored that California's bench and bar have so consistently and helpfully stepped forward to advance the interests of the judicial branch by advocating our cause before our sister branches of government. Thank you again for your service to the courts and to the people of California.

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